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**Beacham et al.**

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(54) **SECURE KEY DISTRIBUTION SERVICE**

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See application file for complete search history.

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U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

This patent is subject to a terminal dis-  
claimer.

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H04L 9/0819; H04L 9/0802; H04L 61/1511;  
H04L 61/1523

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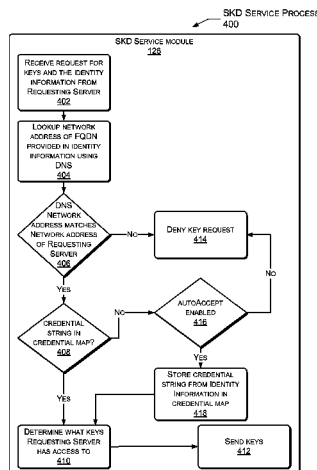
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A secure key distribution server (SKDS) determines the iden-  
tity of a requesting server without use of a shared secret by  
resolving the fully qualified domain name (FQDN) to a net-  
work address and comparing it with the network address of a  
key request. A credential string may also be used as part of the  
identification. Once identity is established, keys may be  
securely distributed. The SKDS may also be implemented in  
a peer-to-peer configuration.

**16 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets**



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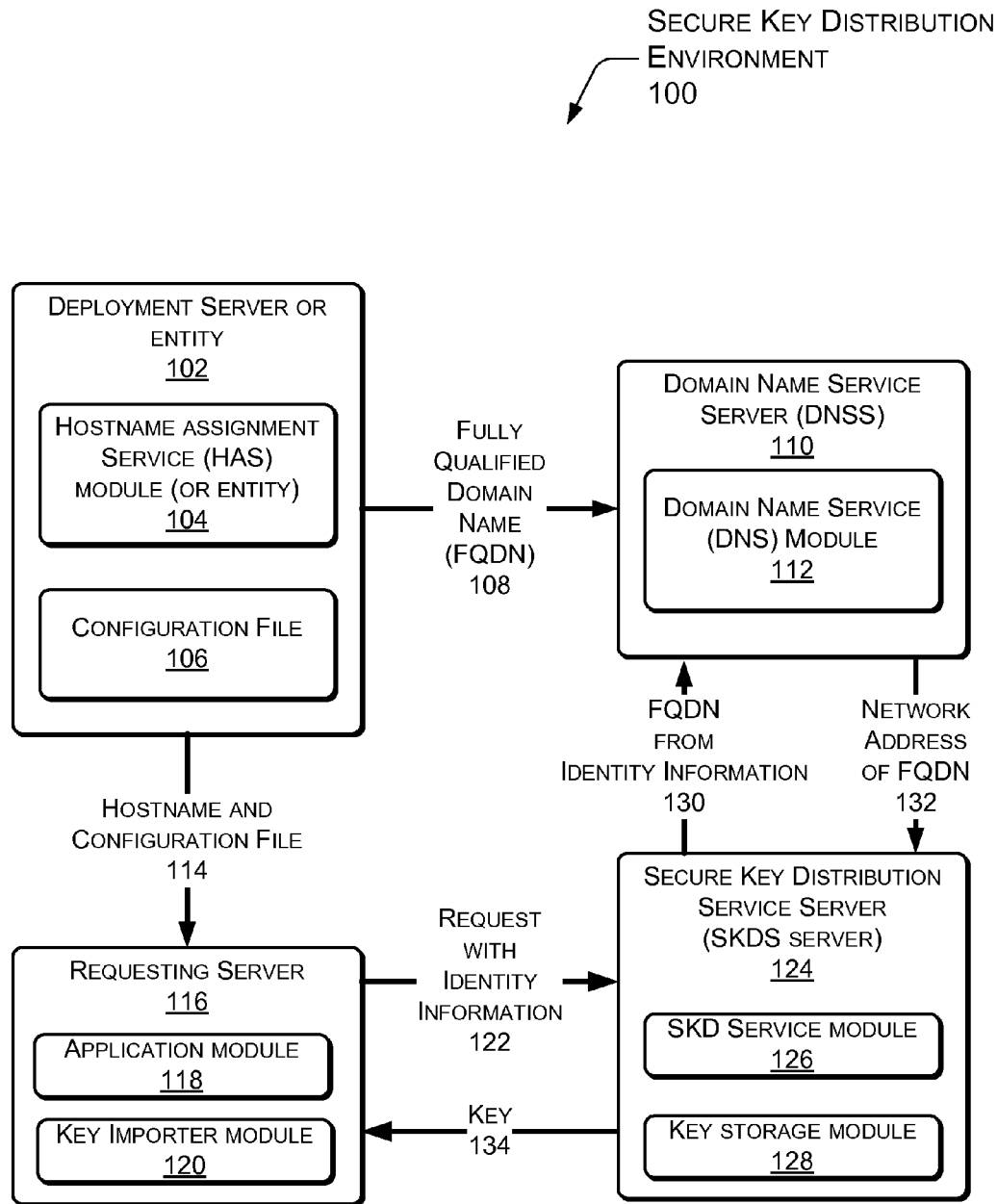


Fig. 1

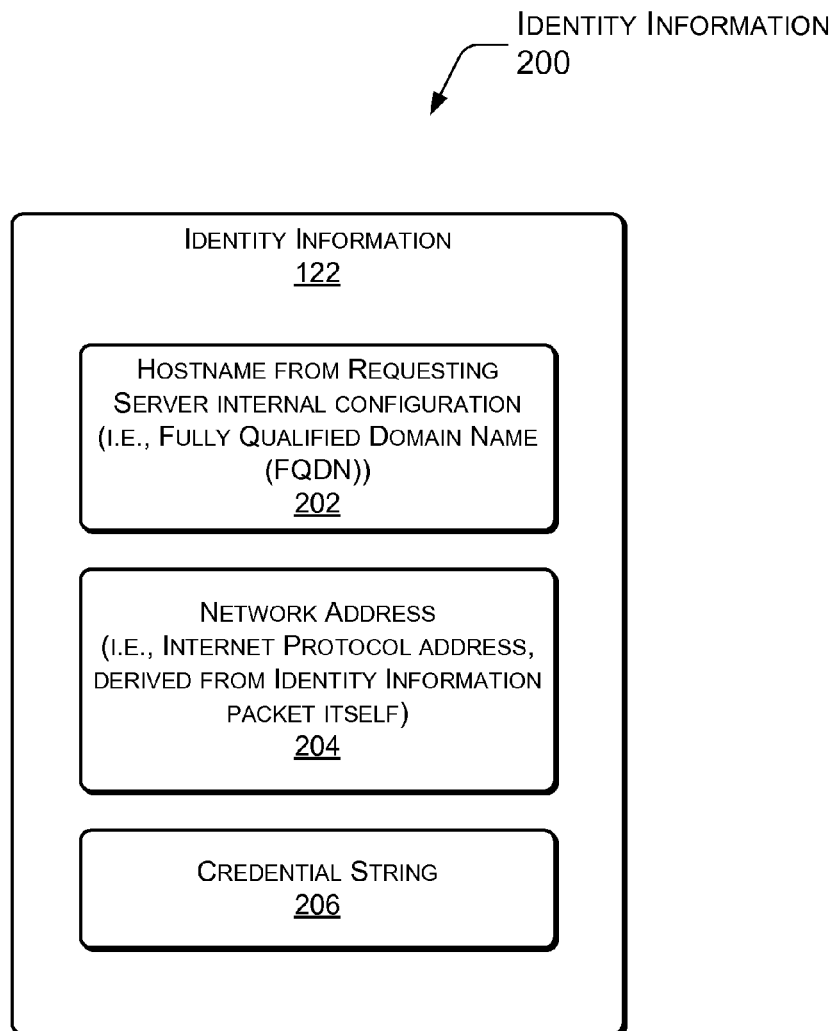


Fig. 2

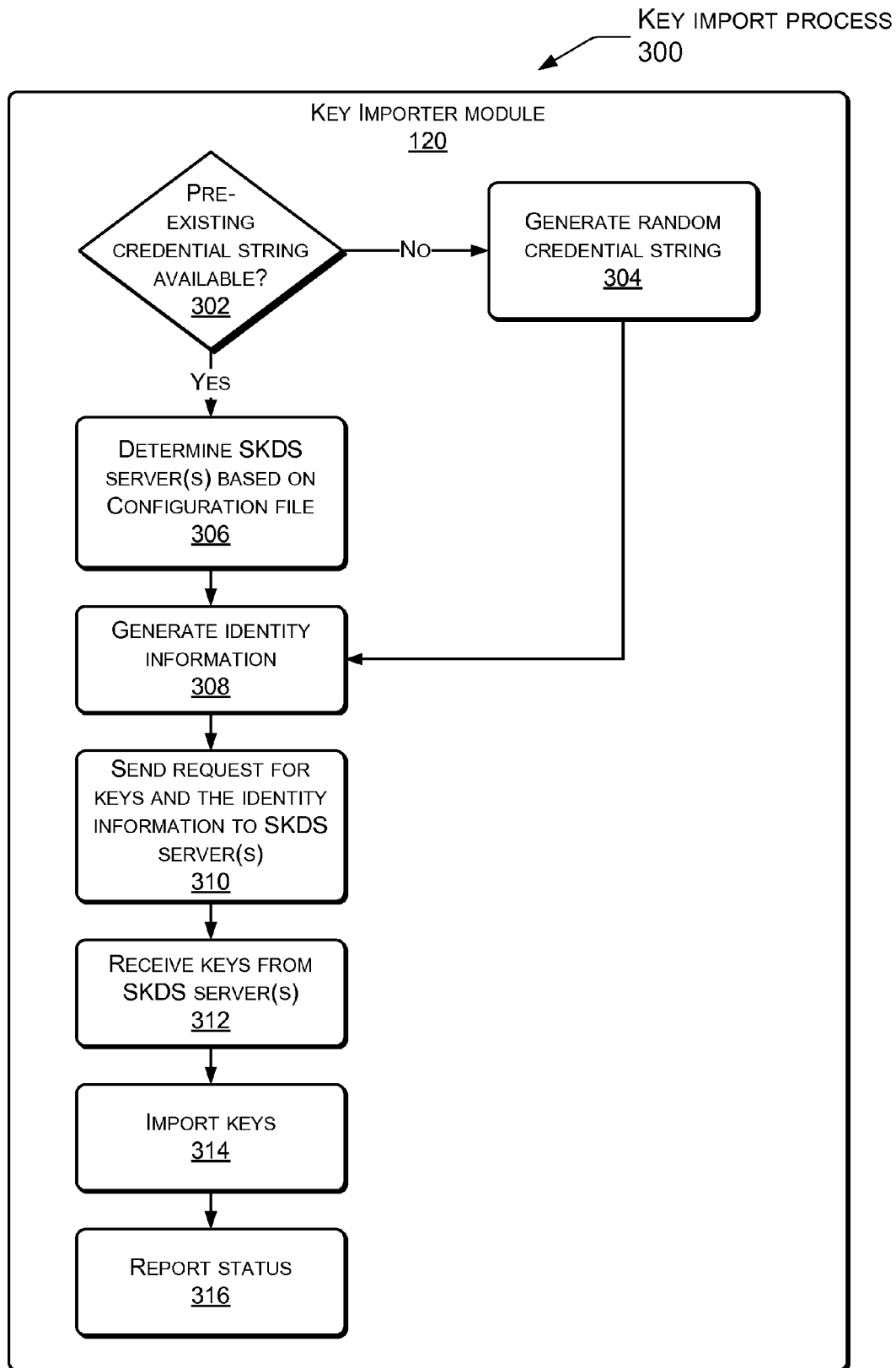


Fig. 3

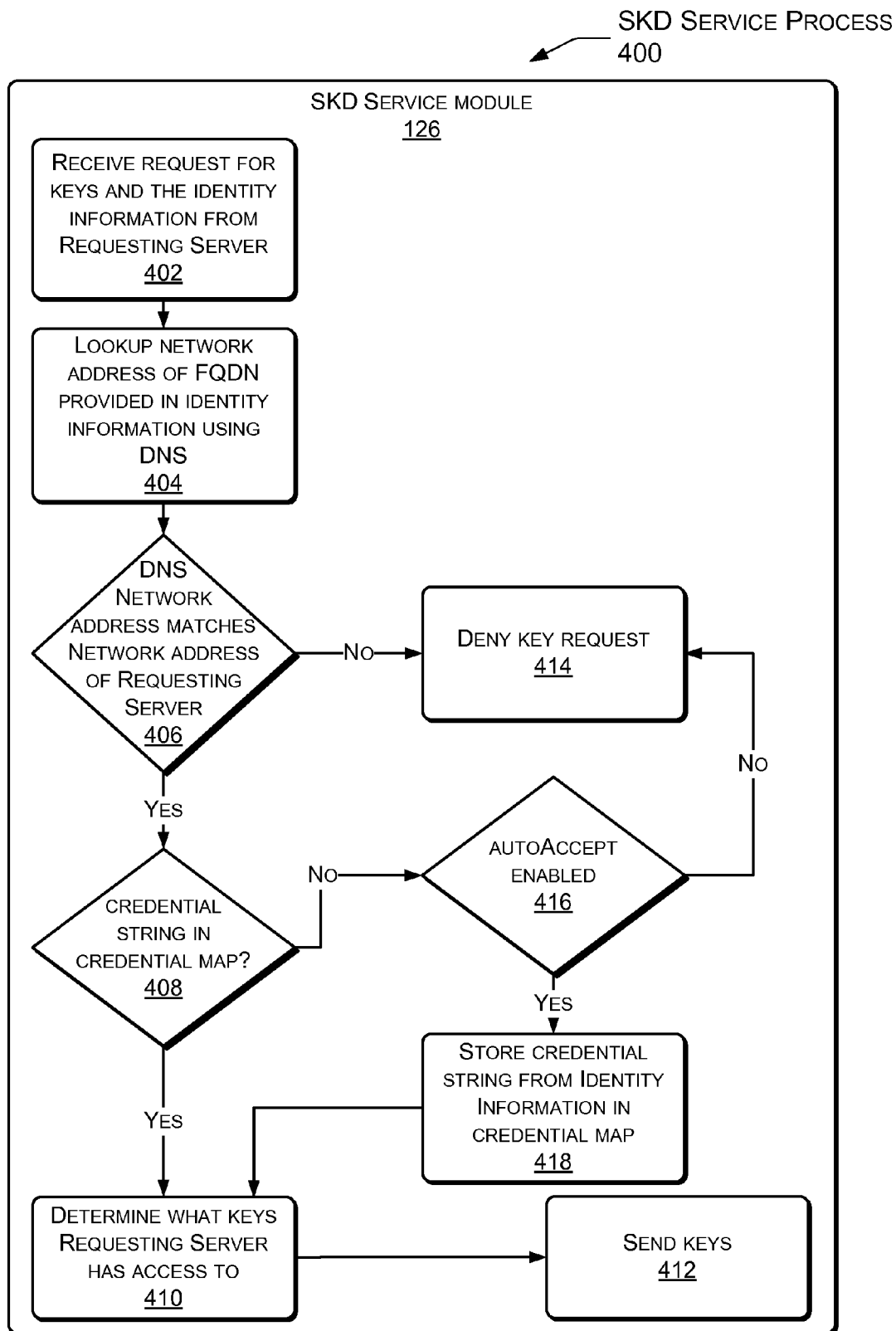


Fig. 4

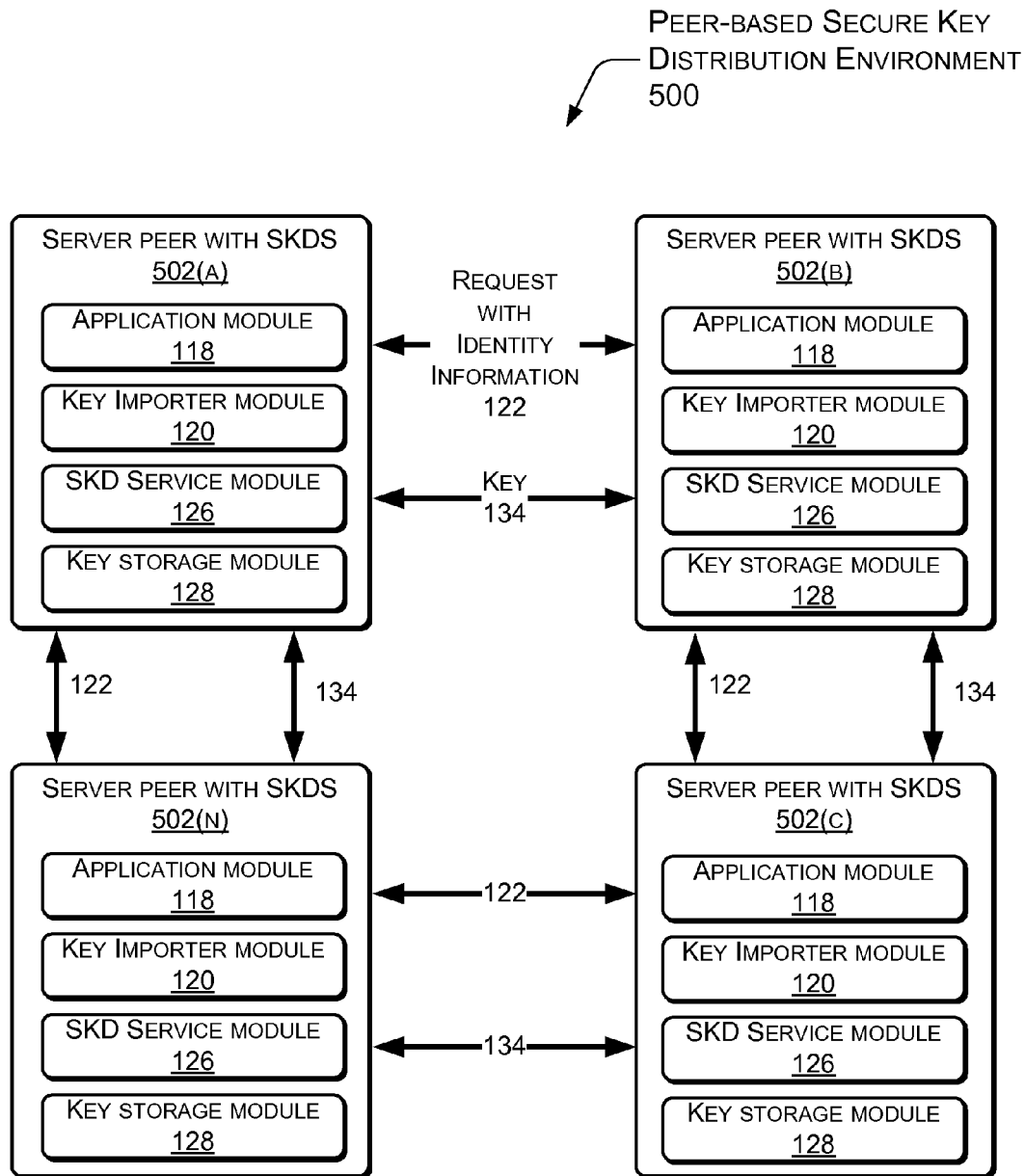


Fig. 5

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
KEYNAME AND KEY WHITELIST  
600

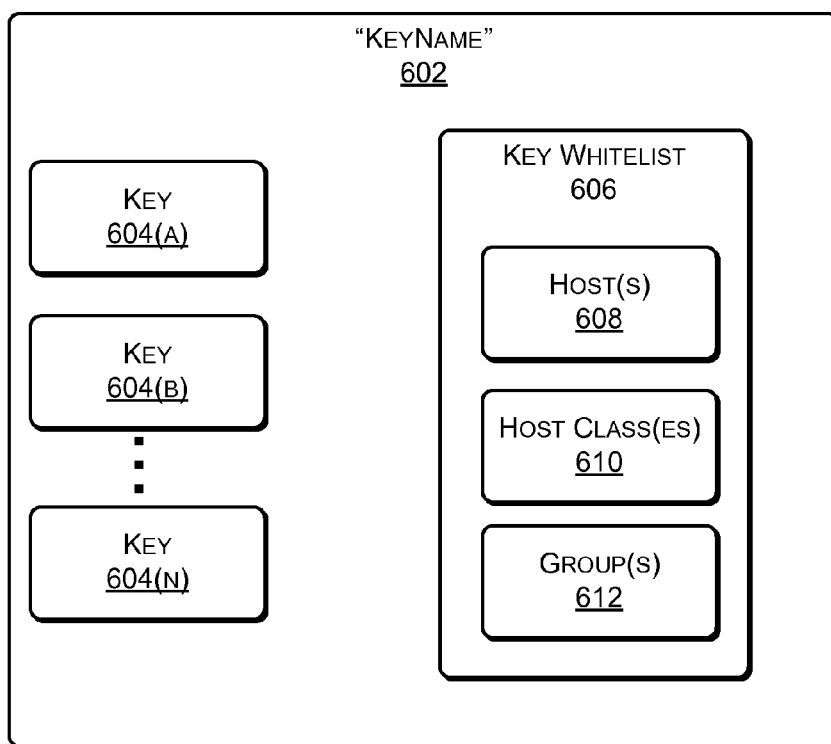



Fig. 6

COMPOSITION OF GROUP  
700


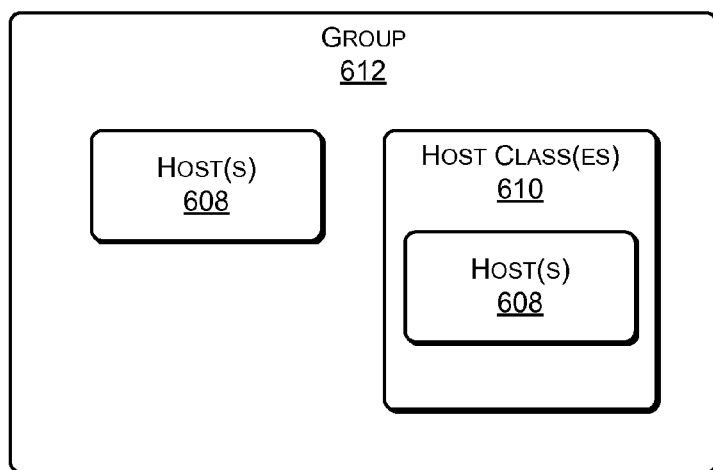



Fig. 7

PROCESS OF DETERMINING  
WHAT KEYS REQUESTING  
SERVER HAS ACCESS TO  
800

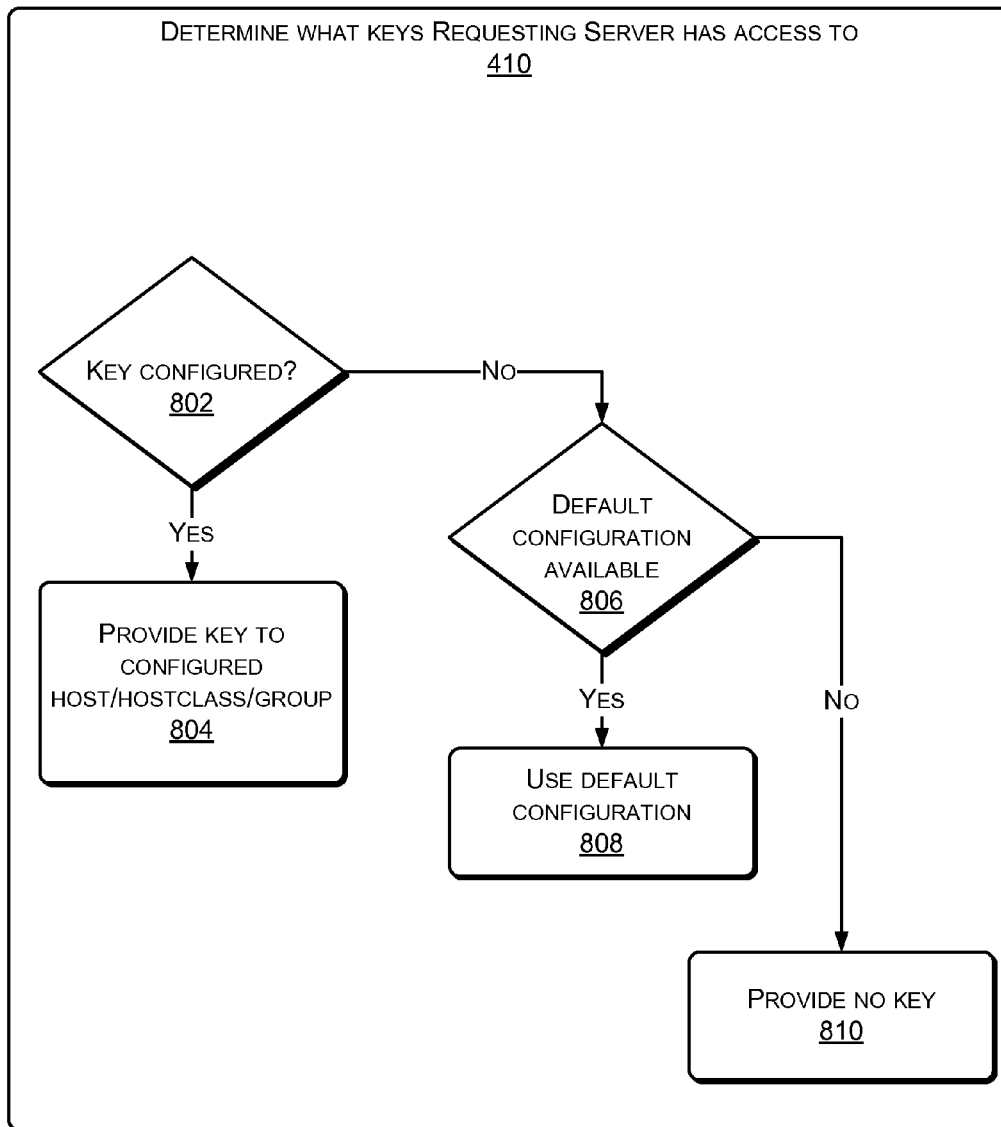


Fig. 8

**SECURE KEY DISTRIBUTION SERVICE****PRIORITY CLAIM AND CROSS-REFERENCE  
TO RELATED APPLICATION**

This application claims priority to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/429,494, filed Apr. 24, 2009, which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

**BACKGROUND**

Distribution of encryption keys or other small parcels of sensitive data in a secure fashion has traditionally proved difficult. One of the difficulties arises from the problem of identifying valid devices which are allowed to receive the sensitive data. Without proper identification, sensitive data may be provided to an unauthorized or otherwise undesired device. Typically, this identification has either been insecure with minimal overhead, or secure but incurring significant operational overhead setting up the trust relationship a priori. This overhead increases where a data center incorporates multiple teams or groups each with their own requirements. In constantly changing and expanding server environments such as data centers, insecurity may lead to compromise of a server while more secure identification methods may prohibitively increase operational overhead.

Thus, there is a need to distribute keys or other small parcels of sensitive data in a dynamic server environment while minimizing operational overhead.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

The detailed description is set forth with reference to the accompanying figures. In the figures, the left-most digit(s) of a reference number identifies the figure in which the reference number first appears. The use of the same reference numbers in different figures indicates similar or identical items.

FIG. 1 is a schematic of an illustrative secure key distribution (SKD) environment.

FIG. 2 is a schematic of illustrative identity information used in the SKD environment of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a flow diagram of an illustrative key import process.

FIG. 4 is a flow diagram of an illustrative SKD service process.

FIG. 5 is a schematic of an illustrative peer-based SKD environment.

FIG. 6 is a schematic of an illustrative relationship between a key name and a key whitelist which may include hosts, host classes, and groups.

FIG. 7 is a schematic of an illustrative composition of the group from FIG. 6.

FIG. 8 is a flow diagram of an illustrative process of determining what keys a requesting server has access to.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION****Overview**

As described above, determining the identity of a device on a network has proven problematic. Before sending sensitive data to a recipient device, it is typically desired to identify the recipient device to ensure that the recipient device is permitted to have the sensitive data.

As used in this application, a device may be a server, client, router, or other computing device. For simplicity in descrip-

tion but not as a limitation, devices are referred to as “servers” in some of the implementations described in this application.

Sensitive data includes encryption keys, configuration data, access control lists, etc. For simplicity in description but not as a limitation, in some instances sensitive data is described in the context of a “key” in this application.

In the dynamic environment of a data center, which may contain thousands of physical or virtual servers on a network, traditional solutions of identification impose undesirable administrative and operational loads. Quite simply, it becomes too difficult and/or expensive to handle the identification of servers and distribution of keys, particularly initial distribution during deployment of a server on the network.

This disclosure describes a secure key distribution service (SKDS) that minimizes the time and expense of validating servers on a network. As described above, “key” or “keys” may refer to encryption keys or other small parcels of sensitive data. The SKDS leverages the controlled nature of server setup in a network to aid in the establishment of identity, which is then used to distribute sensitive information. During setup, a hostname, such as a fully qualified domain name (FQDN), is assigned to the server. The FQDN is registered with a directory service such as a domain name service (DNS) or lightweight directory access protocol (LDAP). For simplicity in description but not as a limitation, the directory service is referred to as a “DNS” in this application.

Information entered into the DNS for a new host server is considered relatively trustworthy because the new host is setup with the network within a specified time period. The underlying network protocols are also assumed to be reasonably secure. For example, transmission control protocol (TCP) of the internet protocol (IP) is considered to be reasonably secure from “spoofing,” particularly in a network environment such as a data center. “Spoofing” occurs when a legitimate network address is hijacked and the hijacker pretends to be the hijacked server. However, spoofing has proven to be very difficult to accomplish except in very special circumstances.

Using these assumptions, the SKDS provides for identification of a host and distribution of a key without requiring a pre-shared secret. Removing the requirement for a pre-shared secret removes the complexity and traditionally manual steps involved in that shared secret exchange. Instead, a request is sent from the server to the SKDS. The request includes identification information, which comprises the FQDN of the requesting server, the network address derived from the request packet itself, and a credential string from the requesting server. The SKDS resolves the FQDN to a network address and compares this resolved network address with the network address in the request packet. In one implementation, when the network address from the request packet matches the resolved network address, identity is affirmed. As used in this application, “match” may be an equality, an equivalence, substantial correspondence, or other specified mapping between data. For example, a network address using Internet Protocol version 4 which is equivalent to a network address using Internet Protocol version 6 is a match.

In another implementation, the credential string may also be compared. Thus, in addition to the comparison between network addresses, when the credential string matches an entry in a credential map used by the SKDS, identity is affirmed. This provides additional identity assurance. The credential map comprises a dynamic binding of credential strings for established identities mapped to principals (hostnames). The credential map may be manually or automatically populated. Automatic population of the credential map further minimizes manual intervention.

## Secure Key Distribution Environment

FIG. 1 is a schematic of an illustrative secure key distribution (SKD) environment **100**. Shown at **102** is a deployment server or entity configured to assist in the provisioning and/or deployment of servers or other computing devices. This deployment server or entity may be automated in the case of an automated deployment system utilizing deployment servers, or manual in the case of a person who handles a deployment with or without the aid of an automated deployment system. For clarity, in the remainder of the application, deployment server **102** is described as an automated system with automated components. However, in other implementations any or all of these components may be implemented manually.

Deployment server **102** includes a hostname assignment service (HAS) module or entity shown at **104**. HAS **104** may include a module configured to provide hostnames or be a manual process wherein a person assigns a hostname to a requesting server to be deployed. Deployment server **102** may also generate a configuration file for use by a server during deployment to configure the deployed server for communication with the SKDS.

During deployment, deployment server **102** provides the FQDN to a domain name service server (DNSS) **110**. DNSS **110** includes a domain name service (DNS) module **112**. DNSS **110** may include the domain name system described in Internet Engineering Task Force Request for Comments documents RFC 1034 and RFC 1035, LDAP, or any other directory service configured to resolve an assigned hostname to a network address. DNS module **112** may be configured to respond to requests for resolution of a name to a network address, and may otherwise maintain the directory of servers.

As part of the deployment process, deployment server **102** provides **114** the FQDN **108** and configuration file **106** to the requesting server **116**, which is being deployed. Requesting server **116** may include an application module **118** configured to execute applications on the server and a key importer module **120** configured to request and accept keys on the server.

The key importer module **120** may be configured with information from the configuration file **106**. This configuration file **106** may include a list of available SKDS servers (SDKSS) **124**. Key importer module **120** may then proceed to request keys from the SKDS server **124** to import. In one implementation, the SKDS server **124** may trigger a request **122** from the requesting server to allow for a "push" of updated key information.

A request with identity information **122** is sent from requesting server **116** to SKDS server **124**. This request may be sent using secure hypertext transport protocol (HTTPS) or other protocol to prevent the identity information from being sent as clear text across the network. This identity information **122** may include a FQDN and the network address of requesting server **116**, and is described in more detail in FIG. 2 below.

SKDS server **124** includes a SKD service module **126** configured to receive requests and a key storage module **128** configured to retrieve keys as permitted. SKD service module **126** sends **130** the FQDN present in the identity information **122** to DNS **110** for resolution. DNS **110** is presumed to be trustworthy, resolves the FQDN to a network address, and returns this network address **132** to SKDS **124**.

SKD Service module **126** may then compare the network address of the request **122** with the resolved network address **132**. This provides a simple and reasonably secure method of establishing an identity because of the trustworthy nature of the name server which resolves the network address **132**. When there is a match, the SKD service module **126** retrieves

a key (or keys) from the key storage module **128**, and returns the key **134** to the requesting server **116**. As described above with respect to the request **122**, the key **134** may be transmitted using HTTPS to prevent the key information from being sent as clear text across the network. Key importer module **120** may then import and store key **134** for use by the requesting server **116**. In one implementation, communications secured with key **134** from requesting server **116** are now possible.

FIG. 2 is a schematic of illustrative identity information **200** used in the SKD environment of FIG. 1. Identity information **122** may include a hostname **202**, network address **204**, and credential string **206**. Hostname **202** may be a FQDN, or other naming convention used to designate a specific server on the network. Hostname **202** is taken from the internal configuration of the requesting server **116**. Network address **204** may be the internet protocol (IP) address or other network address as defined by the networking protocol in use. Network address **204** may be derived from the packet information containing the request itself, i.e., a "source" address field, or be explicitly stored as payload within the packet. Credential string **206** may be a string which is generated at the requesting server, as described next in FIG. 3. Credential string **206** makes it more difficult for an attacker to spoof a device because the credential information is not normally exchanged during operation of the requesting server and is not independently derivable or externally assigned.

## Key Importer Module

FIG. 3 is a flow diagram of an illustrative key import process **300** that may, but need not, be implemented using the architecture shown in FIG. 1. The process **300** will be described in the context of the architecture of FIG. 1 for convenience and clarity. This illustrative process may use key importer module **120**. Key importer module **120** may, but need not, reside on requesting server **116**.

At block **302**, the requesting server **116** determines whether a pre-existing credential string is available. At block **304**, when no pre-existing credential string is present the requesting server generates a credential string. Credential string generation may incorporate a random or pseudo-random string generation or hash processes. In some implementations, the credential string may be generated or incorporate or both, information derived from the requesting server **116**.

At block **306**, the requesting server determines which SKDS server(s) are available to fulfill requests based on information in the configuration file provided during or after deployment. In one implementation, the configuration file may itself be updated using the SKDS server where the configuration file is sent instead of an encryption key.

At block **308**, the requesting server generates identity information for transmission to the SKDS server. As described above, identity information may include FQDN, network address, and the credential string.

At block **310**, the requesting server sends a request for keys and the identity information to the SKDS server indicated in the configuration file. When the SKDS server allows sending of keys, at block **312** the keys from the SKDS server are received. At block **314**, the requesting server imports the keys into key storage for use by the requesting server's encryption application. At block **316**, the requesting server may report status of the key import to a log file, user, SKDS server, administrative server, etc.

## SKD Service Module

FIG. 4 is a flow diagram of an illustrative SKD service process **400** that may, but need not, be implemented using the architecture shown in FIG. 1. The process **400** will be described in the context of the architecture of FIG. 1 for

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convenience and clarity. This illustrative process may use SKD service module 126. SKD service module 126 may, but need not, reside on SKDS server 124.

At block 402, the SKDS server receives a request for keys and the identity information sent by a requesting server. At block 404, the SKDS server resolves the FQDN present in the identity information to a network address using DNS. At block 406, the SKDS server compares the resolved network address provided by DNS with the network address provided in the identity information of the requesting server.

When a match is found at block 406, the SKDS server, at block 408, determines if the credential string in the identity information is present within a credential map. When at 408 the credential string is present in the credential map, the SKDS server has established the identity of the requesting server and at block 410 the SKDS server determines what keys the requesting server has access to. Once the SKDS server determines at block 410 what keys the requesting server has access to, at block 412 the SKDS server sends those keys to the requesting server.

Returning to block 406 at the SKDS server, when no match is found between the resolved network address provided by DNS and the network address provided in the identity information of the requesting server, block 414 denies the key request.

Returning to block 408, when the credential string is not present within the credential map, the SKDS server at block 416 may be set to enable automatic acceptance of credential strings. This automatic acceptance may be appropriate in, for example, large data centers or other dynamic deployment environments where manual maintenance of a credential map would prove cumbersome or expensive. Automatic acceptance of credential strings may be considered an acceptable risk when it is assumed that a requesting server is likely to be uncompromised soon after deployment and requests originating outside the datacenter are blocked. This assumption is based on the observation that compromise to a server in a data center is unlikely to occur during initial provisioning. Traditionally servers are not compromised until after an operating system is installed, thus an assumption may be made that for a given period of time after starting the deployment, the server is unlikely to be compromised. Later compromise of the requesting server may then be revealed by a request for keys with a credential string differing from that stored in the SKDS server credential map.

When block 416 at the SKDS server is set to enable automatic acceptance of credential strings, block 418 stores the credential string provided in the identity information from the requesting server in the SKDS server credential map, and proceeds to block 410 for determination of what keys the requesting server has access to. When block 416 at the SKDS server is set to deny automatic acceptance of credential strings, block 414 denies the key request for requesting servers that do not have a credential string stored in the credential map. A response indicating this denial may be sent to the requesting server.

#### Peer-Based Distribution Environment

FIG. 5 is a schematic of an illustrative peer-based SKD environment 500. Large or distributed environments may benefit from distributed key deployment and accessibility. Such distribution improves reliability and responsiveness of the key distribution system. FIG. 5 depicts server peers with SKDS 502(A) . . . 502(N). Server peers with SKDS 502 may include an application module 118, key importer module 120, SKD service module 126, and key storage module 128.

Server peer 502(A) may send a request for keys with its identity information 122 to server peer 502(B). Server peer

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502(B) may process the request as described above with respect to FIG. 4. When server peer 502(A) is identified, server peer 502(B) may return key 134. When a server peer 502 has newly joined the network, it may build its store of keys through requests to other server peers 502(N). In addition to keys, information exchanged may include updated configurations, lists of current SKDS server, etc. In this fashion, keys are distributed throughout the network to server peers with appropriate access. Control mechanisms such as time to live, number of SKDS servers to interrogate, distances to SKDS servers, etc., may be incorporated to prevent burdensome or infinite network traffic.

#### Key Handling and Distribution

FIG. 6 is a schematic of an illustrative relationship 600 between a keyname and a key whitelist. A key may be configured to incorporate access information. This prevents inadvertent release of keys to unauthorized hosts. FIG. 6 also illustrates the benefit of minimizing the complexity of maintaining this mapping. Keyname 602 identifies the key and may incorporate multiple keys 604(A) . . . 604(N). For example, these keys 604 may be keys with different serial numbers. The configuration file or store state of keyname 602 may include key whitelist 606. Within key whitelist 606 may be a list of individual hosts 608, host classes 610, or groups 612, which are permitted access to this key. A host class is a grouping of hosts, and may be maintained by a trusted centralized authority such as DNS or LDAP. In this way, various levels of access granularity may be achieved. For example, a key whitelist for keyname "testkey" may contain several entries: First, a host entry designates host "server1.site.com" as having access to the "testkey" key. Second, a host class entry indicates that members of host class "PRODUCTION" have access to the "testkey" key. Third, a group entry may indicate that servers which are members of the group "SECURED" have access to the "testkey" key. Thus, servers not enumerated in the host entry, but which are members of the "PRODUCTION" host class or "SECURED" group would also have access to this key.

FIG. 7 is a schematic of an illustrative composition of a group. Hosts may be aggregated into groups for ease of administration and to simplify management in complex environments. For example, servers which are in test or pre-production release status may be members of a "TEST" group. Each group 612 may include a list of individual hosts 608 and host classes 610. As described above, host classes 610 may further incorporate a list of individual hosts 608. Thus, a group "SECURED" may include a specific host "testserver1.site.com" as well as a "TESTSERVER" host class. Other test servers which are members of the TESTSERVER host class would then have access to this key.

FIG. 8 is a flow diagram of an illustrative process 800 of determining what keys a requesting server has access to. The process 800 may, but need not, be implemented using the architecture shown in FIG. 1. The process 800 will be described in the context of the architecture of FIG. 1 for convenience and clarity. This illustrative process may use SKD service module 126. SKD service module 126 may, but need not, reside on SKDS server 124.

At block 802, the SKDS server determines if the key is configured to be accessible to specified hosts. This configuration includes the hosts incorporated through the key whitelist 606 for each keyname 602. At block 804, the SKDS server provides the keys to a host which is listed in the configuration, when that configuration is available at block 802. When no configuration is available at block 802, at block 806 the SKDS server determines if a pre-determined default configuration is available. For example, a default configuration

may include providing access to a default key. When a default configuration is available, at block **808** the SKDS server uses that default configuration. Thus, pre-defined alternate secure data such as a key is provided when the requested data is unavailable. When no default configuration is available, at block **810** the SKDS server provides no key to the requesting server.

## CONCLUSION

Although specific details of illustrative methods are described with regard to the figures, it should be understood that certain acts shown in the figures need not be performed in the order described, and may be modified, and/or may be omitted entirely, depending on the circumstances. As described in this application, modules and engines may be implemented using software, hardware, firmware, or a combination of these. Moreover, the acts and methods described may be implemented by a computer, processor or other computing device based on instructions stored on memory, the memory comprising one or more computer-readable storage media (CRSM).

The CRSM may be any available physical media accessible by a computing device to implement the instructions stored thereon. CRSM may include, but is not limited to, random access memory (RAM), read-only memory (ROM), electrically erasable programmable read-only memory (EEPROM), flash memory or other solid-state memory technology, compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM), digital versatile disks (DVD) or other optical disk storage, magnetic cassettes, magnetic tape, magnetic disk storage or other magnetic storage devices, or any other medium which can be used to store the desired information and which can be accessed by a computing device.

What is claimed is:

### 1. A method comprising:

receiving, by a secure key distribution service (SKDS) server device, identity information from a requesting server device, the identity information comprising a fully-qualified domain name (FQDN) of the requesting server device, a credential string, and a network address of the requesting server device;

providing, by the SKDS server device, the FQDN to a domain name server device;

retrieving, by the SKDS server device, from the domain name server device a resolved network address at least partly in response to providing the FQDN to the domain name server device;

comparing, by the SKDS server device, the network address of the requesting server device with the resolved network address;

authorizing, by the SKDS server device, transmission of encryption key information at least partly in response to determining that the network address of the requesting server device matches the resolved network address;

determining that automatic acceptance of credential strings is enabled for the requesting server device; and  
determining that an encryption key is accessible to the requesting server device at least partly in response to determining that automatic acceptance of credential strings is enabled for the requesting server device.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the requesting server device is one of a plurality of server devices of a data center.

### 3. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

comparing the credential string from the requesting server device with a previously stored credential string associated with the requesting server device, and

wherein the transmission of the encryption key information is authorized at least partly in response to determining that the credential string provided by the requesting server device matches the previously stored credential string.

### 4. The Method of claim 1, further comprising

determining that automatic acceptance of credential strings is enabled for the requesting server device as a result of determining that the credential string is not present within a credential map.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the automatic acceptance of credential strings is enabled for a period of time after deployment of the requesting server device.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the requesting server device, the domain name server device, and the SKDS server device are separate and distinct devices.

7. One or more non-transitory computer-readable storage media storing computer-readable instructions that, when executed, instruct a processor within a secure key distribution service server device to perform operations comprising:

receiving a request for at least one key from a requesting server device, the request including a fully-qualified domain name (FQDN) of the requesting server device, a credential string, and a network address of the requesting server device, wherein the at least one key is an encryption key, sensitive data, or a combination thereof; sending the FQDN of the requesting server device to a domain name service server device;

receiving a resolved network address of the requesting server device at least partly in response to sending the FQDN of the requesting server device to the domain name service server device;

determining that the resolved network address matches the network address of the requesting server device included in the request for at least one key;

determining one or more keys available to the requesting server device in response to determining that the resolved network address matches the network address of the requesting server device;

determining that automatic acceptance of credential strings is enabled for the requesting server device; and

determining that the at least one key is accessible to the requesting server device at least partly in response to determining that automatic acceptance of credential strings is enabled for the requesting server device.

8. The one or more non-transitory computer-readable storage media of claim 7, wherein the operations further comprise:

receiving an additional request for one or more keys of a plurality of keys from an additional requesting server device; and

determining that the plurality of keys are not accessible to the additional requesting server device.

9. The one or more non-transitory computer-readable storage media of claim 8, wherein the operations further comprise determining that a default configuration is available to provide access to a default key for the additional requesting server device at least partly in response to determining that the plurality of keys are not accessible to the additional requesting server device.

10. The one or more non-transitory computer-readable storage media of claim 7, wherein the operations further comprise:

determining that the credential string matches an entry in a credential map of previously stored credential strings; and

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determining that the at least one key is accessible to the requesting server device based at least in part on the requesting server device being included in a key white list, wherein the key white list includes at least one class of hosts permitted access to the at least one key.

11. The one or more non-transitory computer-readable storage media of claim 10, wherein the key white list further includes a list of individual hosts permitted access to the at least one key and at least one group permitted access to the at least one key.

12. A method comprising:

receiving, by a secure key distribution service (SKDS) server device, identity information from a requesting server device, the identity information comprising a fully-qualified domain name (FQDN) of the requesting server device, a credential string, and a network address of the requesting server device;

providing, by the SKDS server device, the FQDN to a domain name server device;

retrieving, by the SKDS server device, from the domain name server device a resolved network address at least partly in response to providing the FQDN to the domain name server device;

comparing, by the SKDS server device, the network address of the requesting server device with the resolved network address;

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authorizing, by the SKDS server device, transmission of encryption key information at least partly in response to determining that the network address of the requesting server device matches the resolved network address; and providing an encryption key to the requesting server device at least partly in response to automatic acceptance of credential strings being enabled for the requesting server device.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the requesting server device is one of a plurality of server devices of a data center.

14. The method of claim 12, further comprising:

comparing the credential string from the requesting server device with a previously stored credential string associated with the requesting server device, and

wherein the transmission of the encryption key information is authorized at least partly in response to determining that the credential string provided by the requesting server device matches the previously stored credential string.

15. The method of claim 12, wherein the automatic acceptance of credential strings is enabled for a period of time after deployment of the requesting server device.

16. The method of claim 12, wherein the requesting server device, the domain name server device, and the SKDS server device are separate and distinct devices.

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